



Announcing the League of Innovative Schools

A New Regional Support Network for New England's Secondary Schools and Educators

In October 2010, the New England Secondary School Consortium assembled a group of dedicated educators from Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont to devise a new regional strategy for supporting the redesign of secondary learning at scale. No longer satisfied with pockets of excellence—where student performance and learning outcomes are often determined by zip code—these educators set out to create an open, collaborative, educator-driven network that encourages, inspires, nudges, and supports schools to improve, while also explicitly acknowledging the talents, capacity, and commitment already present in New England's high schools. These teachers, principals, superintendents, and state officials are excited to announce the Consortium's League of Innovative Schools, and to invite high schools across the five states to join our new regional network.

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Membership Overview

The decision to become a member of the League of Innovative Schools is made entirely by the participating schools—it will be the result of thoughtful consideration, not a consequence of external mandates, requirements, or judgments. Schools will be asked to carefully and thoroughly review the New England Secondary School Consortium's mission, values, and goals, and to complete *Global Best Practices*, our comprehensive self-assessment process, before making the decision to join the League. Once a school decides to become a member, the Consortium will ask for a formal letter of commitment signed by (at a minimum) the district superintendent, principal, school leadership team, and school board chair. When the letter is received, full member status is granted whether the school has been engaged in an improvement program for years or is just beginning the process.

League members who are already engaged in a preexisting school-improvement process supported by grant funding, state programs, or other means will be temporarily designated Project Schools. As such, these schools will agree to the same obligations and benefits as other member schools while continuing to fulfill the responsibilities and expectations of the preexisting project.

Benefits of Membership

The League will promote a collaboration-driven improvement model that utilizes research-based best practices and that encourages professional accountability through peer interaction and transparency, rather than by imposing predetermined expectations. Certain basic membership requirements—such as the signed letter of commitment and an agreement to use *Global Best Practices* as a framework for self-assessment, planning, and innovation—will be expected, but schools are encouraged to pursue a redesign process that meets the needs of their students, teachers, and community.

League of Innovative Schools benefits will include:

- ⇒ Access to an innovative new professional learning community that harnesses the talents, expertise, and resources of secondary schools and educators in five states
- ⇒ A structure for coordinating and scheduling site visits to other schools to learn about innovative programs and ongoing improvement work
- ⇒ Regularly scheduled professional dialogue and support sessions—conducted in-person or via teleconference and videoconference—with colleagues in other member schools
- ⇒ Professional development opportunities organized by individual schools, participating programs, or the Consortium itself, including conferences, workshops, and webinars
- ⇒ Data monitoring and analysis support that encourages evidence-based school improvement, including potential training sessions, webinars, networking opportunities, or related tools
- ⇒ When requisite funding, capacity, and resources are available, Consortium personnel may be available to facilitate the *Global Best Practices* self-assessment process, provide on-site school coaching, offer teacher-leader training, help school access online courses, guide policy development, and support other targeted strategies aligned with the Consortium's values, mission, and goals. These additional benefits may only apply to specific member schools or designated Project Schools as circumstances and resources allow.

Membership Obligations

Schools interested in joining the League of Innovative Schools will be asked to review the vision, mission, and goals of the Consortium, determine the school community's level of commitment to League goals, and evaluate existing readiness and capacity to participate. The following section outlines general obligations that League schools will embrace when they decide to join the network.

Core Beliefs

League members will (1) embrace the vision, mission, and values of the New England Secondary School Consortium; (2) commit to and explicitly work toward the Consortium's performance goals; and (3) make a public commitment to school improvement and develop an action plan aligned with the Consortium goals, state-supported school reform strategies, and identified student, faculty, and community needs.

Evidence of a school's commitment to these beliefs will be documented by (1) a letter of commitment signed by—at a minimum—the district superintendent, principal, leadership team, and the school board chair; (2) a brief report summarizing the results of the school's *Global Best Practices* self-assessment; and (3) a brief statement describing the level of faculty, staff, parent, and community commitment to school improvement and the League mission.

Collegial Accountability

The League is founded on the principle that professional integrity, self-accountability, and collaboration can dramatically transform schools. In an era of primarily top-down school accountability, the League will provide a collegial, peer-to-peer accountability model. Districts and schools will act as critical friends to one another, holding themselves and other members professionally accountable through ongoing communication, collaboration, and commitment. Consortium staff will assist in the coordination of related networking activities and will be available to help schools make connections with other members.

Strategic Actions

Once schools decide to become official members, or during the process of exploring membership, schools will identify a primary League contact and school-based leadership team. The principal and leadership team will evaluate readiness, establish membership status, and coordinate the membership activities described below.

- 1. Conduct a self-assessment using *Global Best Practices*.** Rather than give school leaders and teachers a simple list of recommendations, *Global Best Practices* offers a practical, step-by-step process that schools can use to assess their relative performance in key areas and shape their school-improvement plans. The action-oriented tool and review process distills common characteristics of high-performing schools in the United States and abroad, and the self-assessment process can include teachers, school administrators, superintendents, school boards, parents, and other members of a school community. A *Global Best Practices* self-assessment will be conducted with faculty and staff during the initial year of membership to identify strengths and potential areas for improvement, though schools can continue to use the tool in subsequent years. To download the tool, a summary of background research, and a facilitator's guide, go to newenglandssc.org/resources/publications.
- 2. Examine local and state policies.** Member schools will review existing policies to identify leverage points that can be utilized to advance or sustain school-improvement work and potential barriers to achieving school or Consortium goals. Schools will move toward alignment with, or creation of, high leverage local policies that support three key strategies: (a) graduation decisions that are based on demonstrations of learning; (b) implementation of flexible learning pathways; and (c) development of an accountability system focused on student learning and school practices.
- 3. Develop a League of Innovative schools action plan.** League schools will develop an online action plan based on (a) the results of the *Global Best Practices* self-assessment, (b) a review of performance data, (c) an examination of current policies, and (d) an evaluation of existing local, regional, and state initiatives aligned with school and League objectives. Members will submit their plan to the Consortium using an online tool (not yet developed). Consortium staff will support action-plan development, as funding and capacity allows, including areas such as data analysis, goal setting, the identification of research-based strategies, and the design of an annual evaluation process by which the school will assess progress towards meeting its goals. League schools will also support one another as an extension of membership in the network. To facilitate sharing and collective learning, the Consortium will publish action plans, school profiles, and other relevant data on a website for League members to use.
- 4. Establish a system of ongoing data collection and analysis.** As part of their commitment to the school-improvement process, League members will work with a Consortium evaluation team to identify, monitor, and report on a range of relevant student and school-wide data, including annual reporting on a selection of common metrics developed in collaboration with the five state departments of education. The common metrics are consistent methodologies for reporting graduation rates, dropout rates, postsecondary-enrollment and -persistence rates, and selected data points indicative of college and career readiness. Any additional reporting will depend on funding and lessons learned during early stages of the League of Innovative Schools implementation, but it is likely to include measures of student engagement (such as attendance rates or disciplinary referrals) and academic achievement using both traditional measures (such as NECAP, SAT, or AP scores) and newer competency-based assessments.
- 5. Participate in League networking opportunities and professional development.** League schools will be able to participate in state-supported professional development opportunities, regional programs conducted by the Consortium, and other local and regional learning experiences provided by schools and partners within the League network. Efforts will be made to design these activities in response to needs identified by member districts and schools. League schools will also be given opportunities to go on site visits to other schools, host school visits, and participate in phone calls with colleagues that will serve as a source of both peer accountability and invaluable professional development.
- 6. Communicate with other schools in the network.** Each League school will be expected to participate fully in this new professional learning community by supporting and receiving support from other members. Regular phone calls, teleconferences, and videoconferences will be used to facilitate communication among schools.
- 7. Participate in an annual peer accountability phone call.** This annual activity will be designed to challenge and support each school through collegial, peer-to-peer accountability. The annual calls will help to reaffirm beliefs,

maintain momentum, and address progress made toward the achievement of goals over the previous year. Using a framework provided by Consortium, school principals will engage in professional discussions with other principals in the network.

- 8. Host and participate in school visits.** Member schools will participate in school visits to further their own learning and support the work of other League members. The League will expect schools to conduct at least one site visit during the first two years of membership, although interested schools can schedule additional visits at any time. While a League school may not be called upon to host a school visit each year, members will agree to host at least one site visit each year. The Consortium will help school identify suitable matches and provide sample agendas, norms, and facilitation protocols for use in planning and structuring the site visits.
- 9. Report annually using common metrics.** As state above, schools will work with a Consortium evaluation team to identify, monitor, and report on common metrics, school-performance data, and related information that demonstrates progress made on the League of Innovative Schools action plan. The reports will be used by member schools as a foundation for data-driven, evidence-based school improvement.
- 10. Contribute to action research.** The League of Innovative Schools will promote research-based best practices for school improvement. The Consortium will provide resources to facilitate the collection and analysis of data to make this process as simple, easy, and useful to member schools as possible. League schools will likely be asked to participate in annual staff and/or student surveys, evaluator site visits, interviews, and/or case-study research focused on capturing innovative practices and League-related work. The Consortium will also seek funding to develop data-collection tools and support research on the impact of the League's regional school-improvement network.

About the New England Secondary School Consortium

The Consortium is a pioneering partnership committed to fostering forward-thinking innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education across the New England region. The five partner states of Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont believe that our bold vision, shared goals, and innovative strategies will empower us to close persistent achievement gaps, promote greater educational equity and opportunity for all students, and lead our secondary educators into a new era. The Consortium is funded by the Nellie May Education Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Great Schools Partnership, a nonprofit school-support organization based in Maine, is the Consortium's lead coordinator.

The Consortium's aim is to ensure that every public high school student in the five states receives an education that prepares them for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century. By 2016, the Consortium intends to:

1. increase four-year, on-time graduation rates across the five states to ninety percent or higher;
2. decrease annual drop-out rates to less than one percent;
3. increase the percentage of students enrolling in two- and four-year college-degree programs or pursuing accredited postsecondary credentials to eighty percent or higher;
4. reduce the number of students required to take remedial courses during their first year of college to five percent or less; and
5. engage postsecondary institutions, organizations, and colleagues in a collaborative effort to ensure that more students enroll in and complete postsecondary education.

Our Mission

The New England Secondary School Consortium develops and supports bold educational innovations that will empower the next generation of citizens, workers, and leaders to be prosperous, knowledgeable, and responsible participants in our global community.

Our Vision

The New England Secondary School Consortium envisions every adolescent in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont graduating from a new generation of high-performing, internationally competitive high schools prepared

for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of our interconnected global society. By building equitable systems of public secondary education in each of our states, we envision the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that were once the possession of a few becoming the universal standard for all. Our students will not only be proficient in the traditional academic disciplines, but they will be creative thinkers, adaptable workers, and informed citizens equipped to face the diverse challenges of the 21st century.

We see our traditional public high schools evolving into versatile community learning centers that prioritize individual learning needs above other concerns, blend secondary and postsecondary experiences, provide engaging educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and offer a variety of student-designed pathways to graduation—all while emphasizing global understanding, multicultural awareness, technological literacy, real-world applications, and other demanding 21st-century skills and proficiencies.

As we forge ambitious, forward-thinking partnerships among states, educational organizations, postsecondary institutions, and schools to leverage resources and expertise in pursuit of our common mission, we envision a fundamental cultural shift taking hold in the hearts and minds of our educators, policy makers, parents, and citizens as the traditional concept of the American high school is redefined to mirror the lives, interests, and learning needs of today's students.

Our Theory of Action: Strategies at the Intersection of Policy and Practice

The Consortium's vision, mission, goals, and strategies have been developed, revised, and vetted by teams of experts, policy makers, secondary educators, and state leaders from across the five member states over the past three years. Our Theory of Action is based on the belief that our ambitious goals will only be met if we attend to both policy and practice simultaneously. The Consortium's policy work recognizes that, while significant progress has been made in recent years, far too many state and local policies present barriers to high school transformation or fail to put in place the necessary support, incentives, or mandates required to change schools, motivate leaders, and improve student performance and educational outcomes. By working together collaboratively across state lines, we are working to create new, more focused, and better utilized policies at both the state and local level that can advance and sustain school improvement.

Yet policies alone will not be sufficient. In October 2010, teachers, principals, superintendents, and state education agency staff members from each of our member states came together to form the League of Innovative Schools Strategic Action Team. Over several months and many meetings, this diverse team developed a comprehensive plan to provide on-the-ground support to secondary schools committed to the hard work of school improvement and to the Consortium's mission, values, and goals. Starting this coming fall, the League of Innovative Schools will provide a new system of collaborative, peer-to-peer accountability and networked professional development opportunities across the region.

Our proposed support network for school redesign is a major departure from existing models. Historically, school redesign has followed one of two major pathways: (1) an open-invitation, limited-accountability network that any school can join, or (2) an intensive support model in which significant resources are committed to a small number of schools with the intention of replicating successful practices in other schools.

While these approaches have achieved success, both have failed to realize sustainable, large-scale systemic improvements across states or regions—which is the Consortium's goal. Far too often, broad support networks embrace such a wide variety of ideas that breadth is prioritized over depth, and significant change fails to materialize. Alternatively, the progress made by model schools is rarely reproduced at scale or replicated in schools that lack similar levels of funding and support.

The League of Innovative Schools is pulling together the best features of these disparate transformation models, while striving to overcome the limitations of each. Our regional network will support deep, systemic improvement work while guiding and encouraging peer collaboration to accelerate and strengthen the process. Instead of asking schools to emulate others, the network will engage schools in an ongoing exchange of professional learning, sharing, reflection, and growth. Instead of holding up a handful of quality schools as exemplars, a significant number of schools across the region will work together to collaboratively determine the best strategies to adopt and the expected measures of quality and progress. While every member school will make the same commitment to improve, the League recognizes and embraces the fact that schools progress in different ways and at different rates.

Strategic Action Team

The League of Innovative Schools was developed by a diverse group of educators and state leaders committed to supporting secondary schools. While the League framework is a product of this team, the core ideas that motivated its creation originated in real schools and classrooms across New England.

Connecticut

Karen Adesso, Bureau of Student Assessment, Connecticut State Department of Education

Barbara Beaudin, Associate Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education

Francis Kennedy, Principal, Stafford High School

Everett Lyons, Connecticut Liaison, New England Secondary School Consortium

June Sanford, State Director Career and Technical Education, Connecticut State Department of Education

Maine

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Diana Doiron, Standards-Based Specialist, Maine Department of Education

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New Hampshire

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Steve Chamberlin, Superintendent, Hopkinton School District

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Rhode Island

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Jaime Crowley, Assistant Principal, Mt. Hope High School

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Greg Young, Vermont Liaison, New England Secondary School Consortium

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